

# Post-Pandemic Career Realignment

*Avoid These 7 Mistakes To Best Propel Employees Post-Pandemic Growth*

By Ryan Curtis, P.E.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has been life-changing and life-altering since its stronghold took reign early in 2020. A work-from-home approach became the norm, and many professional industries wrestled with keeping employees in or away from the office. As a result, career evolutions (or stagnation) have run rampant over the past 12-18 months. Without taking intentional time to pause and record the impacts on one's life, employees have ridden the COVID-19 wave and need introspection on what the necessary steps forward look like.

As employees continue to face the current work-modified environments and erratic market movements, they should consider the following mistakes to evaluate their current state of self and the impact on those immediately around them within their respective organizations.

**Leaders, managers, and production staff should pay keen attention** to avoid these critical 7 mistakes to ensure they are challenging and propelling themselves forward as the workforce turns the corner on the Covid-19 season.

## Mistake #1: Disregarding Goal Setting

*Career growth is still possible amidst a pandemic and especially after a pandemic.* Without goal setting and forward-facing areas of technical or leadership growth, employees are prone to get stuck in the reoccurring cycle of a constant task-driven schedule, better known as the daily grind. Ponder the tasks performed on every project, assignment, or the routine meetings teammates have with their co-workers. As employees continue to get the necessary work done and meet all the requirements of a demanding position, they are likely not pausing to seek areas of improvement. How has staff taken the simple day-to-day production and/or managerial assignments and improved upon them? When employees set short-term (0-3 years) and long-term (3+ years) goals, they are immediately aware of what target to run after and the most needed areas of improvement. Consider a holistic approach to a career while setting goals. What can a teammate accomplish in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond? By



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considering personal and professional growth decade by decade, this reverse engineering approach can help place goals more sensibly and practically. Employees will see the roadmap of the leader they want to become and then start growing into that leader.

## Mistake #2: Pushing off Employee Reviews

*Both Junior and Senior Staff need to be aware of their career progression.* If there are a handful or significant number of direct reports within a manager's role, do not lose sight of the needs of those individuals. At a minimum, younger staff *absolutely* need bi-annual or annual performance reviews to ensure they are growing in the technical areas to achieve licensure, certifications, or generally increased project responsibilities. When reviewing a direct report's body of work since Covid-19 began, consider the adjustments the employee has had to make to continue their productivity while balancing the everyday "zoom" and "teams" calls within work-from-home environments. Those who have excelled should be recognized for their adaptability. These teammates have proven that they should be considered for future leadership positions, having demonstrated resiliency and the ability to serve their peers

and clients amidst the chaos. Those individuals who have struggled with job performance since the pandemic are certainly not alone. Continue to develop and lead these teammates into scenarios of "easy wins" to regain their confidence and momentum.

If formal personal performance reviews have been paused due to pandemic-driven reasons, encourage leadership and direct superiors to review their teammate's performance regardless of financial compensation outcomes. Everyone benefits from feedback, especially when it is meaningful, encouraging, and honest.

## Mistake #3: Forgetting about Employee Self-Needs

*Inhale, exhale, repeat.* It is reported that Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, keeps his weekly calendar clear until 10 am so he has the time and space to maintain AND grow his bandwidth once the days and weeks get moving. Take a cue here from Mr. Bezos. Consider employees' self needs. Where have employees missed opportunities to have time to reflect and recharge? Perhaps it is yoga, running, spiritual, or spending time with a spouse. Whatever it is, encourage staff to make space in their calendar and hold fast to it. These hours or days of self-focus will make

employees more productive and consistent when it is needed most. In addition, if a company's direct labor ratio has remained high thru the pandemic season, it is likely that teammates are fatigued and have not taken the necessary time away from work. Encourage time away for a substantially healthier and rejuvenated team.

Overall mental health and well-being have dropped 33 percent since the pandemic began, according to a survey conducted in the Fall of 2020 by Hibob, an HR service company based in New York. This likely impacts employees, their teammates, and significant others. Reach out and ask for help at all times, not just in an emergency. Organizations benefit from healthy employees, and so do the employees!

#### Mistake #4: Dismissing Employees Work-Life Balance

*Turn it off.* Create space to allow for more bandwidth and more clarity in decision-making moments. Many employees remain in a work-from-home setting and find themselves at the workstation on many occasions past dinner time. Without physically separating themselves from personal workstations, more and more employees are blurring personal time and work time. Smartphones have always challenged this separation, and with new setups (laptops, large screen monitors, desk space), employees face the risk of burn-out every day. With large social gatherings being limited, many find themselves generally at home and within arm's reach of their workstation. In their *State of Remote Report 2020*, Buffer states that not being able to unplug was the third biggest struggle when working remotely.

Without this physical and emotional separation of work and life, employees and teammates become dangerously overwhelmed and overstressed. As a result, work outcomes and deliverables may be performed at a lower level of quality, and, even worse, employees

may become disengaged. Make firm commitments to logging off home computers or keeping phones for personal use at the end of the workday. Encourage teammates to use their PTO and get away at times to fully commit to their personal lives and duties.

#### Mistake #5: Devaluing Employees Skillsets

*Muscle memory becomes mind memory.* What made a great employee pre-pandemic likely made an excellent employee during the pandemic and will propel staff's careers post-pandemic. The skillsets that set employees apart from their peers are also the skillsets that have managed to carry employees through COVID-19. The talents of communication, technical knowledge, leading a small team, and ability to adjust to unforeseen scenarios will continually remain an excellent asset to the business. Consistent physical and mental repetition will lead to self-automation. When employees do things the right way repeatedly, the processes become natural habits. Encourage staff to capitalize on good habits and remain close to them.

#### Mistake #6: Lessening Communication and Connectedness

*Employees are created to be in community.* In the same Buffer Report mentioned earlier, the biggest struggle with working from home is *Collaboration and Communication and Loneliness*. Consider the number of contacts leadership teams are making with staff on a daily or weekly basis. Without prioritized close and consistent communication, the lack of day-to-day physical interactions can slowly degrade an employee's working relationships and wreak-havoc on the efficiencies employees worked so hard to build upon before the pandemic. Encourage staff to check in with teammates,

leaders, and studio managers with purposeful intent. All benefit from intentionality or personalized conversations.

#### Mistake #7: Ignoring Employees Growth Areas

*Embrace areas where employees have grown.* At a minimum, the last year has amplified teammate's shortcomings yet has put on display a company's ability to react and adapt. While individual shortcomings have been exposed, employees have also found ways to improve upon methods of completing specific duties. Revised communication with others and the ability to lead and coach from an isolated setting are just a few. Also, the methods of connecting with clients in more meaningful ways while being socially distant are just as critical. All these areas of newfound growth are signs of more nimble, efficient, and socially connected employees. Consider the years ahead when the organization will gain back physical connectedness with assistants, peers, leaders, and clients. Employees will be placed in a scenario of incredible growth beyond what they have achieved to date; they must accept the challenge and embrace it.

Remember, the skill sets that made employees great teammates before the pandemic also gave employees the ability to survive the pandemic and excel as leaders in a post-pandemic work setting. The tools listed above are culture drivers. The hope is that organizations are committing to concepts that yield healthier teamwork and outcomes. Always remember, *being the culture driver starts with self.* ■



References are included in the PDF version of the article at [STRUCTUREmag.org](https://www.STRUCTUREmag.org).

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“ The skill sets that made employees great teammates before the pandemic also gave employees the ability to endure the pandemic.



## References

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